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ECHOES

Justice, Peace and Creation News

22/2004

POWER
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An editorial note

This issue of ECHOES is coming after a longish pause of over a year and for this we apologise. It has been a year of transition with staff changes but also of a budgetary crisis which made us hold back some areas of our work, including the publication of ECHOES. In some ways this was good as it gave us the opportunity to give a slightly new look to the magazine. But we hope to re-start ECHOES with this issue and will continue publishing it for some time as we see it as an important instrument for our work and for connecting with our networks.

This issue of ECHOES focuses on the issue of Power and the ways it is used and abused in our world. The relevance of this topic in our present world context cannot be minimised. The aftermath of the invasion of Iraq and the continuing threat of the so called war on terror demonstrates once again the power of insolent might. At the same time the continuing wars and conflicts in many parts of the world and the struggles for life continue to dominate our minds reminding us of the powerlessness of civilian populations who bear the tragic consequences.

But, there are other forms of abuse that we see pepetrated by the powerful. Even as this piece is being written the High Level Segment of the Conference of Parties or is being held in Milan. Once again the US has refused to take this negotiation process seriously or to sign in to the Kyoto Protocol on controls for carbon dioxide emissions; and the World Summit on the Information Society in December 2003 meeting for negotiations on the digital divide in our world is going to end in Geneva with no real commitments to ensure equitable distribution of information technologies.

The World Council of Churches engages in these processes because we believe that there is another option. That power can be challenged with a "spirituality of resistance." Therefore, in this issue of ECHOES we include the paper presented by Dr. Konrad Raiser, outgoing General Secretary of the WCC, on this topic. In his paper he proposes that power can be confronted with tools from people's resistance efforts and calls for a politically engaged spirituality as a way to express our faith. We are grateful to the leadership Dr. Raiser has given in the commitment of the WCC to the issues of justice, peace and the integrity of creation and take this opportunity to bid him farewell. We are glad he hands over leadership to Rev. Dr. Sam Kobia, as the new General Secretary, who has long been a friend and ally in our work. Some will recollect that he was Director of the erstwhile Unit on Justice, Peace and Creation.

The challenge from Dr. Raiser has been the main inspiration for the encounters WCC has started with the International Financial Institutions - the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. In fact he presented this paper at a meeting organised to prepare the churches for these discussions with the Bank and the Fund. Encountering these power blocs has been far from easy as it is difficult for those with power to see clearly the impact of their policies on the poor. The power of people, the power of the gospel impels us and inspires us to continue!

Aruna Gnanadason
Coordinator
Justice, Peace and Creation Team
December 2003

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Publisher:
The team coordinator of the Justice, Peace and Creation team: Aruna Gnanadason

Programme staff:
Freddy Knutsen

Editing of articles:
Jeanne Becher

Layout and design:
Barbara Robra

Photos:
photooikumene, Peter Williams

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- Racism and Empire
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All correspondence and inquiries should be directed to:

Justice, Peace and Creation
ECHOES
World Council of Churches
P.O. Box 2100
1211 Geneva 2 Switzerland

Telephone: +41 22 791 61 11
Telefax: +41 22 791 64 09
E-mail: *ECHOES*@wcc-coe.org
Web: www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/news/echoes.html

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POWER

THE MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF POWER

By Julio de Santa Ana

In my mother tongue "power" (in Spanish: "poder") is both a noun and a verb. The meaning of the word is indicated by the structure of the phrase and by its linguistic use. But it can create confusion. In itself the word brings an example of its complexity. "Power", as a verb, signifies the capacity of someone (natural or social being) to do what he or she wants. But as a noun, it indicates domination, empire, a certain use of force or capacity of persuasion that enables someone to impose his or her intentions.

The exercise of power is done using necessary resources. This means that power is unevenly distributed: there are some who have access (through different means) to many resources, while others do not enjoy this possibility.

There is a saying, "to know is to have power". This is true in most cases; however, resources should be employed in a meaningful way. Resources are helpful when they prove to be effective in the interaction of agents. Thus, power is exercised following a certain plan or programme. It is at this point that one can perceive the relationship between power and strategy.

In human societies the use of power is observed when there are asymmetric interactions among human beings. There are some who, on the basis of resources that enable them to be more powerful, can take initiatives. They are 'proactive'. Others, with fewer resources, are only 'reactive'. This relationship was analysed by Hegel in the dialectic between 'the Master and the Slave' in his Phenomenology of the Spirit. Human beings have learned through historic experience that this asymmetric relation can be corrected or reoriented by the action of a third agent (an arbiter, a mediator, a judge).

The complexity of "power" is also manifested when we perceive that it can involve either authority or force, or both at the same time. Authority is not the same as force. The exercise of power cannot be limited only to the practice of force. Power has also other dimensions in its complexity: for example, the ability of someone to persuade other persons. In other words, this is a kind

of power that provokes others to be trustful, to believe what the powerful say. The word of the powerful who create this credibility is not always sweet and mild; it can also be felt as a threat. The point is that those who have not the same capacity of power become convinced that they must accept the orientation of the powerful.

Having said this, it seems to be necessary to distinguish between force and legitimacy. There is a 'legitimate use of power', confirmed by the will of the majority of people who accept it. There are also 'legitimate institutions' which ensure the administration of power. We must also note that there is a "legitimate authority" of certain charismatic persons. Having said this, a question should be raised for further study: Is "popularity" a synonym of "legitimate authority"? Sometimes, those who affirm their power by force become popular for the majority of citizens in a given society.

On the basis of what is implicit in the foregoing, one must recognise that power is manifested through an intentional process that affects, at least, two different actors or agents. It is something imbedded in human relationships. Therefore, power is always relative. I want to make here a blunt affirmation: at the level of human societies there is not such a thing as absolute power.

As analysed in the articles that follow, power happens to be on both macro and micro levels of human societies. The exercise of power is unavoidable when it is necessary to coordinate multiple activities, or trends which can be divergent. This use of power is positive if it is exercised with respect and care. This coordinating praxis can be "associative" (building up a 'contract') or 'hierarchical'. In the first case, power is shared up to a certain point. In the latter, power is expressed by commandments.

Power appears as competitiveness or rivalry. Those who want to impose themselves very often go beyond their own limitations. Power, therefore, is also closely related to human hubris. Through our long history we have learned that very often we use power to dominate and manipulate others. Because of this awareness, it is always necessary that certain conditions limit and control the use of power. The division of power that enables some sectors of society to monitor how some exercise their influence and manage their power is one of the ways that we have built up to correct the abuse or misuse of power. This awareness means that we are invited to cooperate rather than to confront each other as competitors. This is not only valid for individuals, but also for social, economic, political, cultural and religious institutions.

Julio de Santa Ana is a Uruguayan Methodist ecumenist and social scientist. He is a former professor at the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey.

POWER AS A FACILITATOR OF VIOLENCE

A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

By Mercy Amba Oduyoye

Power, the facility to act, control or exercise authority over, abhors obstacles, with the result that those who stand in its way have to be run over and crushed, or pushed aside and ignored. The object of such an exercise experiences this force as violence, a force that violates individual or collective choice or reason or need to be where the individual or the community wants to be. This is not an impersonal power, but one that as been willed, planned and designed, and has the ability to discriminate. It is not like a flood or rapids that sweep away all that lies in its path; neither is it a hurricane or a storm. It is quite simply the facility human beings have for acting in their own interest and for claiming hegemony over others.

This power operates often as the ability to control. The need of some persons to center all things on themselves moves them to seek control of their environment. The control of one's environment often means shaping 'the other' to suit the desired end. 'The other' may be the temperature, the vegetation, the animals, rivers and hills. But most often, the other is another human being. We love to shape 'the other' to fit into our lives, even though this violates the other's space and shape. This violence, inherent in the desire to control, can be so widespread and seemingly so well tolerated that we tend to think of it as the normal state of affairs. The violence that has been nourished as a result of traditional, hierarchical and patriarchal power operations is one that we will now try to examine and to overcome.

The power to achieve is one that all humans have by right and duty of being made in the image of the Creator God. It is therefore the power for good, for the biblical myth has it that at the end of each day, God considered what had emerged from the divine fiat and pronounced it good. It is therefore a violation of one's essential humanity if another should exercise power in a way that destroys that of anyone else.

It is this that inspired the Akan symbol 'Hand and Egg' that represents the use of authority. In human society individuals are authorized to exercise power in a way that promotes the common good. To hold such power is like holding an egg in hand. Hold it too tightly and the egg is crushed, too loosely and the egg slips from one's fingers, falls and breaks. Power used rightly does not bring violence, does not crush the other; rather it creates equilibrium, enabling all to become agents of life and making life in community viable. The same goes for all human groups, down to the smallest unit. The authorization to use power is given with the

expectation that the outcome will be life enhancing and not destructive. An authorized person or body should be a source of life, of nourishment, inspiration and encouragement. In theological terms a source of grace and comfort. Power in this context builds humanity; it does not destroy. Doing violence means that one acts outside of the authorised parameter of effective life-giving and life-enhancing action. An authority that violates humanity and humanness ceases to be legitimate. It is the negative use of power, power over, power to control and to intimidate, power to destroy that makes it difficult to name God as all-powerful or the source of all power.

In this decade to overcome violence, the power we have to contend with is the power that crushes the other. The power people with guns have over those who have none has been demonstrated in Africa's history. Today people try to resist guns with stones and subterfuge, but the power of the gun has been the most violating power on this continent; it continues to cause famine and the mass displacement of people. It causes mass migration and traumatises young and old, women and men and the impersonal environment. The use of this power by individuals in robbery and for settling scores is multiplied a thousand times over as people in authority resort to it to settle political, social and economic challenges. Even more to be feared than guns is knowledge. "Knowledge is power, a man (stet) is but what he knoweth ", I read from my mother's library when I was barely nine and never forgot. Human beings use information and technology to do good or to do evil, to control others or to facilitate and empower. In the hands of individuals and in societies, knowledge is power.

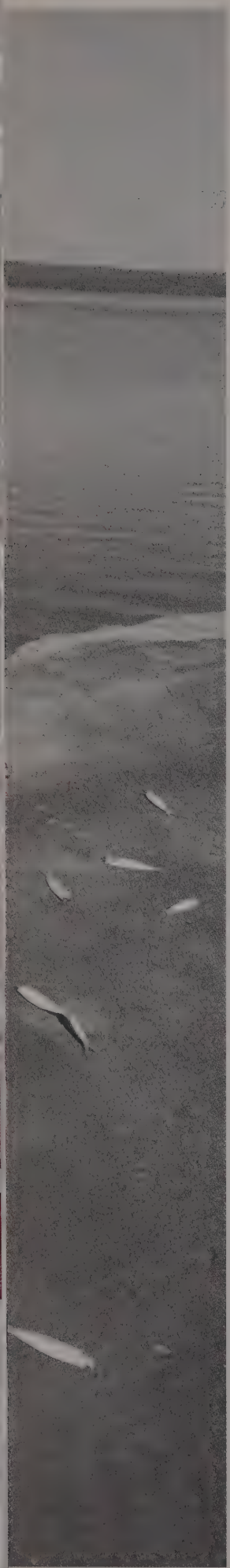
I would like to focus on the power that facilitates the perpetration of violence and knowledge put to death-dealing use. The responsibility that parents have to bring their offspring into adulthood is coupled with the authority to guide. The challenge however, is to hold the egg of authority in a way befitting the image of God. Today we are uncertain about how not to violate the rights of children as we undertake our parental duties. I am using parenting most broadly to include not only nuclear and extended families, but also families of religion. The sort of guidance that religion gives has been known to result in violence in the lives of many individuals. 'Spare the rod and spoil the child' is a well-known example of such advice.

Religion and culture

Religion is the arena where God and spirituality give powerful direction to people's lives. It is also the arena where the line between human power and divine power is thinly drawn. Currently, we are experiencing more clearly the power of religion in the generation of violence. The interpretation of jihad and crusade in the current global crises is plain to us all. But aside from the extreme form of religion-generated violence, the power of religion to shape a culture of violence in human relations can be amply illustrated. Christian leaders use "spare the rod and spoil the child" even in marital relation to urge husbands 'to punish' and 'to correct' their wives as if one's wife were one's child. But that is the logic of patriarchal marriages. In patriarchal marriages as in other patriarchal structures, only the powerful have a right to have rights. Moreover, religion has been known to take the side of the powerful while pleading the cause of the powerless.

We hide behind our perception that religion encourages the view that women are not equal to men to continue the violation of women. This is what happens in the practice of *Trokosi*, where young girls are enslaved for the wrongdoings of family men. It does not make this system any more acceptable if we are able to show that a similar thing happens in charismatic churches. The practice of *Trokosi* in some African Christian churches only goes to confirm how wrong it is to use religion to exploit women. If a pastor heals a man and he cannot pay the fees, would he keep the man working for him till the fee is paid? Neither the *Yahwe* cult nor the church is showing compassion, but the *Yaweh* cult is, in addition, punishing the innocent and letting the criminal go free. That vicarious suffering is at the root of Christian theology cannot be ignored.

Rape is a taboo in traditional society and so it is generally covered up. However, in both rape and adultery, it appears the culture does not see the woman as the injured party. It is the 'owner' of the woman, father, uncle or husband who needs to exact satisfaction. He is compensated from fines paid by the offender. The power to seek redress does not lie with the victim. The same principle of male power over female body is evident in wife beating. A pastor would frown upon the practice but would not blame the perpetrator. In such cases, the only solution is to seek reconciliation, requiring the woman to return. What we do to the earth we do



the women's bodies. The power to exploit the powerless is demonstrated when we seek reconciliation without requiring the wrongdoer to admit to the wrongdoing and apologise. We do not require men to apologise and to show a commitment not to return to their violent ways. The absolute power of men in such cases is given a religious grounding with the saying, "the one who made you can undo you", appropriating the jeremaic images of the potter and the clay.

The power of purchase power

Economic power has been used to acquire hegemony in both interpersonal and inter-national relations. The right of people to create their own cultures, speak their own language and live on their own land has been abrogated by the global liberalization of commerce and financial arrangements and instruments. All this is facilitated by the power of information technology. Economically powerful nations and financial institutions are imposing their worldviews on those poorer than themselves whom they draw in to their systems. Economic power is used by individuals and groups to shape the lives of others. In the process the creativity of the poorer partner is shaped to please or to benefit the richer one. Economic power is used to put limits and to circumscribe the weaker partners so that they remain subservient. The psychological damage done to those on the receiving end diminishes them and robs them of their self-esteem. We have seen this in operation both on the micro-economic and macro-economic levels.

Political hegemony

That political power can be used to generate violence is also well attested. The violence of colonial dictatorship has been the experience of this continent. The violence of apartheid has only just ended. That parties in power use their position to intimidate whole communities has been a common experience in Africa. They may threaten to exclude whole areas from development efforts or harass persons known to be in opposition and those who associate with such persons.

People wielding political power can design and operated laws to violate the fundamental freedoms of those who might pose a threat to ruling governments. Wielding political power has facilitated violence at all levels and in all periods of Africa's history.

The power of culture

In Africa one's sense of being is upheld by belonging. Outside the family and ethnic group one's identity is shaken, one becomes almost a non-person. Parents will therefore do everything to stamp their children with the marks that identify them as belonging to a wider community. This culture of belonging is positive when it gives one a name, a language and a set of life-enhancing norms by which to live. Seen from another aspect, this practice also limits individual choice, thus violating the rights of individuals. If by tradition one must undertake a prescribed economic activity, associate with prescribed groups and adorn one's body in prescribed ways, individual choice does not matter; this might be experienced as a violation of the rights of the individual. African women have identified some cultural practices that are violent. But this does not mean that men do not suffer cultural violence. The power of the community to define masculinity has done violence to many men, but they suffer in silence, or resort to violent behaviour to compensate. The power of culture is such that one toes the line of the community or suffers exclusion, which is experienced as death. Death, which violates life.

Review

In all walks of life, one can find illustrations of how power is used to facilitate violence. Power is used to make those under its influence act contrary to their desires and wills. This coercive use of power is one that appears in scripture, notably in the story of the liberation of the Hebrews from Egypt. Christian theology however has emphasised the free will of humans and set it in tension with divine will and purpose.

All inter-personal relations are prone to the use of power to do violence to the other. Hegemonic relations between groups can operate in the same way. Benevolent dictatorship or patriarchal love operates to limit the choices and creativity of women and children. In addition to all this is the power human beings have over the natural environment. The power of our machines enables us to remove mountains, fill up rivers and lakes, and change the topography to suit human needs. We fell trees that nature has taken hundreds of years to grow; we pollute waters and destroy their inhabitants. Our power to violate air, earth and water seems limitless. Unlike women and children, nature neither resists nor rebels. Or does it?

The use of power can result in violence against those who do not have equivalent power. But there is nothing

in creation that is absolutely powerless. The repercussions of violating the seemingly powerless are also real. Children turn against family and society, fish die and the atmosphere is poisoned for all, including the welders of absolute power.

Power and theology

These are the experiences that I bring to a theological reflection on power, citing the human experience of the use of power by God as found in the biblical records and in Christian history. The panorama we are presented with is extremely diverse, contradictory and ambiguous. We begin with God who, by a divine Fiat, created a world and pronounced it good. On the level of human relations we begin with God decrying murder but protecting the life of the murderer. And yet the Christian history of salvation has as its centrepiece the glorification of the violence of the cross as God's way of bringing liberation and the inauguration a new creation. That the cross was defeated by the resurrection does not change the scene. Christianity places God's power between the crucifix and the empty cross.

The history of Israel gives us a picture of a God who supports disinheriting a people in order to provide for his chosen ones. The violent use of power to teach pharaoh a lesson resulted in the death of many. (See the events of 11th Sept 2001) Yahweh's profile as a warlike one using his power to provide for his favourites is not a very flattering one. It casts the divine image to suit the doings of a people. Unless we understand that this is a biased account of a particular people, we have a problem. Yahweh becomes an alibi for Israel's displacement of other peoples.

We shall need a yardstick for determining when Yahweh is acting and when the people of Israel are acting. If God decries murder and oppression and exploitation, then Yahweh would redeem people from these evils, even with a "Strong Hand". The prophets provide a profile of Yahweh as caring for all peoples, loving mercy, justice and compassion, as feeding the hungry and winning back the lost with love. Yahweh would even allow disasters to teach a people to return to godlike ways. This withdrawal of protection must be most painful to one who is all-powerful. A just use of power is accompanied by self-limitation. Remember the egg and hand analogy? The hand had received the authority to act on behalf of the community. The same goes for all human groups, down to the smallest unit of family and couple. God has the power. The crucial factor in both is how it is used and to what purpose. If Christian theology derives from all this, an attribute of God as all-powerful (almighty), then we would have to say, all power resides in God.

But there is another challenge. What is the meaning of the prophetic "thus says the Lord?" Contemporary Christianity in Africa has a lot of this and even more so the power-filled utterance, "in the name of Jesus". "Harnessing" the power of God has become a regular practice. Can the power of God be harnessed or called upon and for what purpose?

The power of parents over their children, Abraham over Isaac, Jephtah over his daughter, the Levite over his woman, is often accepted and ever praised. Some would even hold the first as pre-cursor of God's sacrificing his son for the salvation of human kind. When we review the example of Jesus and those of the Jesus school we observe power being use to uplift others. When we meet incidents like the cursing of the fig tree, we are hard put to associate it with Jesus. Shall we do evil that good may come about? Paul's answer is NO! God forbid. May God use the divine power to prevent us from the wrong use of the power we derive from that source.

Mercy Amba Oduyoye is a former WCC Deputy General Secretary (1987-1994) and one of the founders of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. She is a past President of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians and presently Co-ordinator of the Talitha Cumi Centre in Accra, Ghana.

Violating individual, family and communal bodies:

ON BLINDNESS AND RELATIONSHIPS REVIEWED

By Drea Fröchtling

Definition: Violence described

The term 'definition' contains the Latin term '*finis*', i.e. 'borderline', 'demarcation' or 'end'. The very character of *violence* lies in ignoring the borderlines of an individual, a family or a communal body. Ms E. Milosi (the name was changed to protect the individual), survivor of the genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina, illustrates such violence as follows: "In the 90s, there was a journalist who said to me, " Ms Milosi, could you please define violence for our readers?" I answered that one cannot define violence, "because, in a definition, there is a borderline and there is an end. But when it comes to violence, there is no borderline, and there is no end; violence by its very nature respects no borders. You may think that your body is the outer borderline of who you are, but a soldier will come and invade that very territory of yours with his penis. And you may think that your soul is a sacred space, but then your husband comes and breaks into that very space, shouting at you and calling you names. You may think that your community respects your borders, your body and soul, but then you find that your own people are invading your home, taking all they want to take. That is why I say: There is no way to define violence."

If there is no way to define violence - is there a way to describe it? Descriptions require words, and violence often leaves a person speechless. Maybe violence is in itself a *via negationis*, not in the classical epistemological understanding, but in rather concrete, existential terms: violence as an act(ion) that negates and refuses to see the *imago Dei* in another person or another community; violence as an act(ion) that negates life in its fullness and its comprehensive potential for all. As such, violence can have a personal and a structural face, a cultural and a religious one. Violence is an encounter with life-threatening forces that affect millions of persons in their individual and family lives, in the lives of their communities and in the global economy.

Facts, faces and figures: Violence encountered

Violence defaces. It defaces the humanity of perpetrators and the lives of its victims and survivors. It defaces individual, family and community relationships as well as structures. The global economy leaves the majority of earth dwellers outside the gates, expelled from the *oikos*, the one household comprised of the global economy. It defaces culture as the means of communicating identity and personal and communal experiences the moment it is applied as a hegemonic, unifying steering force or as a (often traditionally legitimised) means of

securing male-centered leadership. It defaces religion if hierarchical relationships are utilised to destroy horizontal relationships with fellow human beings.

We live in a time where statistics of all kinds are highly valued. Important as they may be to get an 'overall picture' of different forms and occurrence of violence, there is always the inherent danger that these statistics deface individual faces and bodies behind abstract facts and figures. For individual fates and individual faces make up the total number of those whose lives are shattered by violence in its various faces.

In Christianity, the divine as well as the human face is of particular relevance. The face indicates a relationship as well as a withdrawal from relationships. Cain, for example, was no longer able to face his brother Abel after contemplating violence as a potential means of securing an influential position. And the psalms plea to God not to turn away God's face from those who approach God in prayer. In the context of the Hebrew Scriptures, hiding one's face meant the breakdown of communication, a rupture in a relationship, be it with God or with human beings. If we can no longer bear the presence of someone, something is obviously wrong in the relationship. The expression "Get out of my face" illustrates this point. 'Facing the other' implies a certain openness towards him or her. Levinas, a French Jewish philosopher, claims that every encounter starts with facing the other. Many mis-encounters happen, willed or unwilled, because we do not face each other. The moment, says Levinas, we look into another person's face, we are responsible for him or her. Why? Because we have encountered a fellow human being with his or her past, vulnerability and hopes, fears, dreams. Faces as much as bodies are great communicators. Faces of elderly people are like an open book in which the his- or herstories are inscribed in every wrinkle and in every scar. Faces communicate a zeal for life, or depression; they communicate joy or sorrow, amazement or fright. Faces bring a person's inner being to the outside. When we fully face each other, we become involved in each other's lives, encountering each other fully.

Such a full encounter is implied in an old Hasidic tale: Early in the morning an elderly man approaches the *rebbe* of a small stetl in Poland. "What is it, *Rebbe*", the visitor starts, "What is it that distinguishes nigh from day, light from darkness?" Silence. The *rebbe* gets up, walks to the window and watches the rising sun. Finally, he turns to his visitor, smiles and answers: "When you look into the face of a person, the face of any person, and you see a brother or a sister in him or her, then, my friend, you know that the day has come and the night is over. Light has overcome darkness."

Living the contra-factual: Violence countered

The term 'religion' goes back to the Latin word *religo*, which means 'to re-connect', 'to bind back', 'to link again'. If we consider that the Bible is a sum of the religious experiences of its individual contributors, then we realise how much religion, how much binding back and re-linking is needed in human relationships, be they with other human beings or with God. The Bible starts with God's relationship to the divine creation (Gen 1:26-27), with the responsibility of the human being, the *imago Dei*, to God and their fellow-creatures and creation as a whole. Creating relationships thus is part of the divine creation - human beings are essentially social beings.

Human life, according to biblical anthropology, is basically an encounter: an encounter with God and an encounter with each other. One of the central terms of such encounter is the Hebrew word *jada*. It is used for God as well as for human beings and comprises a variety of meanings: 'to perceive', 'to realise', 'to learn', 'to know', 'to experience', 'to care for', 'to make oneself known' and 'to have sexual intercourse'. *Jada* is applied to human-human and God-human relationships. Its frequent occurrence throughout the Hebrew Scriptures shows its central status: encounters are of essential importance. *Jada* as a comprehensive way of communication, be it sexual or non-sexual; it is always in danger of rupturing.

The Bible is a storied space. It reflects human life and human encounters, the successful ones as well as the harmful ones, the ones that speak of love and care and the ones that illustrate violence and destruction. It is true, the Bible contains a number of texts that are "texts of terror", as Phyllis Trible has termed them. But there are also other texts that counteract violence and voice a longing for peace and justice, texts that clearly voice the conviction that terror is an error. Violence in these texts is deflected, turned in a hopeful direction. *Metanoia* is a turning that leads to an affirmation of life in its fullness for all; it leads to a reviewing of perspectives and relationships on the textual as well as on the contextual level.

Re-viewing humanity: Learning to see the other

Turning means taking a new perspective, seeing things, seeing people, seeing life from a new angle. Biblical narratives often deal with such reviewing, which couples the notions of change and of religio, of binding back to God and binding back to fellow-human beings. In Mark 8:22-25, such a reviewing experience is recalled: "Jesus and his disciples arrived at Bethsaida. There the people brought a blind man to Jesus and begged him to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him away, out of the village. Then he spat on his eyes, laid his hands upon him, and asked whether he could see anything. The man's sight began to come back, and he said: 'I see men, they look like trees, but they are walking about.' Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; he looked hard, and now he was cured so that he saw everything clearly."

Drea Fröchtling is currently working as an assistant pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hanover, Germany. She is involved in the Processus Confessionis of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Decade to Overcome Violence of the World Council of Churches.

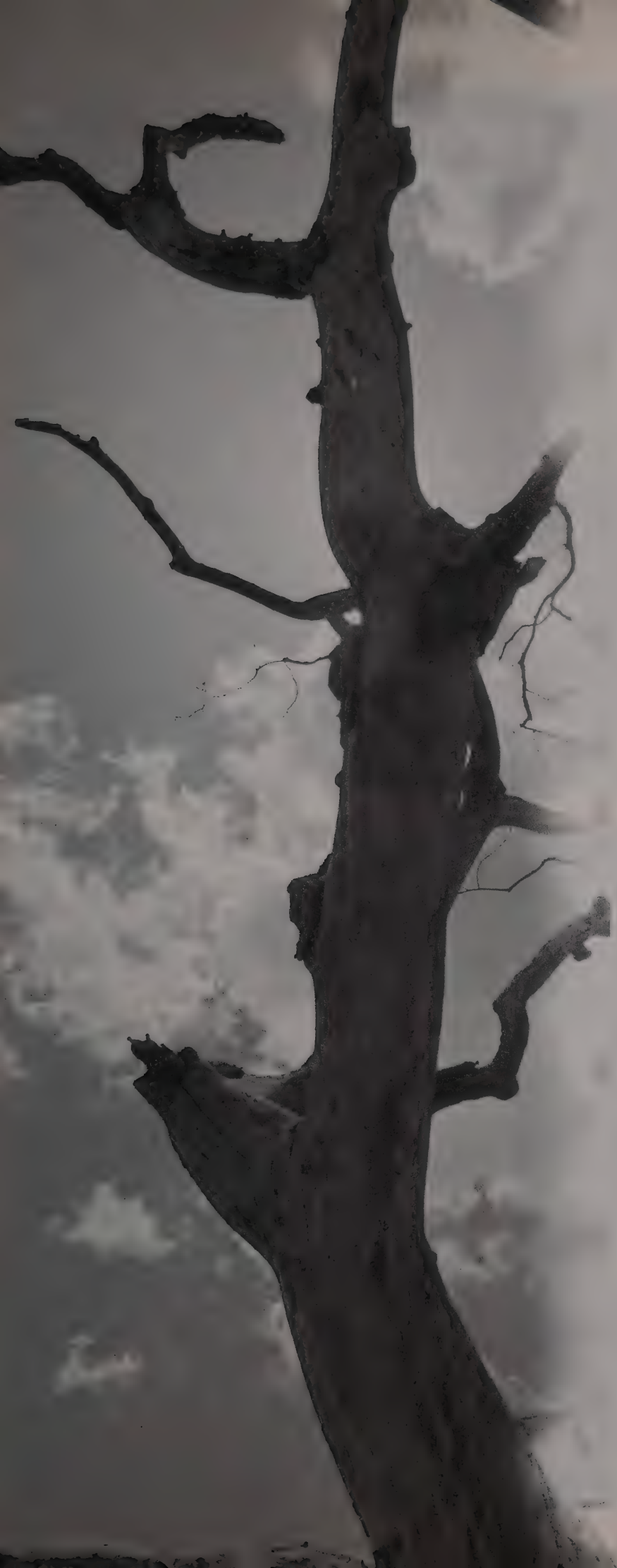
Although at the textual level no mention is made of violence, this text is nevertheless often adduced in bible studies by groups of survivors of violence, particularly by women survivors of domestic violence. Thus, a women from Poland, a woman from South Africa, a woman from Bosnia-Herzegovina and a woman from Angola, all seeking shelter in a women's refuge in Berlin, Germany, agree that "this is a story that is about the overcoming of violence. This blind guy, he never realised that there were people around him, people with feelings, with hopes, with dreams. For him, everyone around was just an object, to be used at his discretion. Jesus teaches that every human being is of infinite worth; every human being is the subject and not the object. I guess that's what Jesus came for as well: To teach us to see others as human beings, not as trees, not as objects. Jesus heals us from the violent use we make of each other when we disregard each other's humanity. Jesus shows us how to see properly again, and when we see properly, we recognise a human being, a human face, as a neighbour again."

Theology is an unsettling experience, and earthquakes and volcanic eruptions of violence in individual and collective life will often lead to a relocation of religion and religious axioms. "Seeing" nowadays is a highly disturbing activity, which often reveals the presence of suffering. Seeing theology or the logos of God leads from the Crucified to his incarnation in the manifold "Eloi, eloi, lama asabthani?" - My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Seeing theology paves the way to his- and herstories of memory, and seeing theology means seeing results in doing, preventing us from closing our eyes to the reality, the daily his- and herstories.

Theology is a life-experience, viewing human experiences, reviewing them in the light of past and biblical experiences and previewing the fulfilment of the kingdom of God. As an anamnesis life experience it is based on the salutary remembrance of the anticipation of new life in Jesus Christ as well as on the memories which form the basis of an individual's life experiences. As an anamnesis life experience it will hardly escape the tension between current experiences and the hope that "violence will be finite one day, finished, gone - and there will be an insurrection against violence that leads to resurrection; people will stand and walk upright once more, people will not lose sight of each other" (Ms Milosi).

The gospel message makes provision for such a vision. It offers a framework for reviewing and reconstituting relationships based upon the notion of the imago Dei. And it encourages the replacement of a culture of violence with a culture of insight and care when facing each other. "When you look into the face of a person, the face of any person, and you see a brother or a sister in him or her, then, my friend, you know that the day has come and the night is over. Light has overcome darkness," asserts the rebbe in the above quoted Hasidic tale.

May we all one day experience such an insight.



Power is the ability
To move and be moved,
a dynamic passion
set into motion.

Power is the willingness
To share
To dare
To be full
And at the same time
To be empty.

The beauty of Power
Is not the same as
the power of its seduction.

The beauty of power
Lies in its essence
to give up power
While celebrating
its power to give.

The power of its seduction
Lurks in the corridors of power
Where the name of the game
Is "my power-is-absolute"
And "get-out of-my way" business.

Yet the power
That is ready to empower
Calls others to dare and grow
To dream and to envision
beyond
the expected.
beyond
the impossible.

The beauty of power
Is gentle, unassuming,
and unannounced...
Power is like a tiny seed
Silently oozing itself
from the ground
of hope and struggle.

By Elizabeth S. Tapia

TRANSFORMING POWER

By Deenabandhu Manchala

The world reacted with shock and awe as millions watched the spectacle of the military superpowers pounding an impoverished and disarmed Iraq. Their sophisticated war machinery and weaponry reverberated non-stop for 40 days, killing over thousands of soldiers and civilians, destroying homes, hospitals, bridges, etc., and toppling the thirty year rule of Saddam Hussein.

It was indeed an impressive display of power. A combination of powers in fact: military, economic and political power, aligned with technology and the media, conspired with frightening precision. This sheer competence of the powerful was so spectacular and overwhelming that many chose to overlook the sharp contrast between the strength of the invaders and the vulnerability of the invaded. After all, power parades itself proudly in the face of the powerless.

No wonder that most of the victims of any form of violence are the powerless and the vulnerable. In most ethnic and religious conflicts today, raping innocent, weak and impoverished women has become commonplace, a potent way of humiliating the pride of the enemy. For example, hundreds of women were raped and children killed during the three-month long bitter religious conflict that saw the massacre of over 2,000 Muslims in the Indian state of Gujarat in 2002. Violence is easily wielded against those who cannot retaliate. Ours is a civilisation that prides itself on its ability to intimidate, subjugate, exploit or destroy the weak.

This points out to us the relation between power and violence. Popular notions of power, experienced in the home, the workplace, in social relationships and international affairs or even in church life, are those associated with manipulation, domination, control, exploitation and oppression. Simply put, these notions of power are at the core of the logic of violence.

Violence then is not just an angry outburst. It is also a key instrument of the powerful. Even though power is an essential factor in the whole realm of life and in all human relationships, it has come to mean the ability to dominate, control, subjugate and destroy. Therefore, various forms of power, whether economic, physical, social, military, political, technological or even intellectual tend to turn violent as they serve the interests of those who possess them.

It is alarming to realise that in today's uni-polar and globalised world, the powerful work together, taking care of each other's interests and goals, and virtually decimating those who do not subjugate themselves to their hegemony. They not only institutionalise injustice and human depravation, but also press religion and the media into their service, seeking thereby to legitimise their hegemony.

This reality of hegemonic powers operating together is nothing new. For centuries in India religious, social

and economic powers have worked together to insure the privileges of the few and maintain the oppression of the many, the low, despicable castes. In many societies, religious and social hegemonies work together to disempower people, and their faces everywhere are mostly of women. Partnership among these powers is so effective that subjugation and depravation are presented as normal, inevitable, consequential and even legitimate.

The irony of the situation is that the victims believe it is true. This tendency among the subjugated is precisely their primary enemy, the enemy within. Unfortunately, those who are liberated from oppressive powers, in the absence of an alternative paradigm of power, tend to imitate the patterns of the oppressors and eventually become oppressors themselves. History has many examples to prove this point. Power therefore intimidates, fascinates and creates an awe of its immense capabilities, which in turn makes us adore, fear, love and desire that same power. This reality of power presents itself as a crucial ethical challenge.

The Decade to Overcome Violence is an occasion for a critical reflection on power as well as a creative opportunity to explore alternative, just and life-affirming ways of exercising power. In fact "Interrogating and redefining power" is one of the five major themes of the theological study and reflection process during the Decade. Such a reflection is also important for the churches' own credentials of justice and peace. Power has always been an important factor within the life of the churches and all its instruments and expressions.

With the combination of institutional and sacred power, churches have often been accused of misuse and abuse of power against their own members, besides ignoring the clamour for justice and fairness in and outside the church. Furthermore, many dominant church traditions, because of their close proximity and patronage of the temporal powers, have either glorified and condoned institutionalised violence, or have shied away from confronting the same. In addition, along with other major religious traditions, the dominant streams of traditional Christian philosophy also consider violence a divine attribute.

Can we address these complex questions by turning to Jesus, the

suffering God, a victim of powers who promises salvation for the whole world? Jesus was executed by powers exercised by the Roman State and the Jewish religious hierarchy. His death was also cheered by a mob in awe of the combined strength of those two powers. How does his death on the cross defeat the powers that killed him?

Many of us believe that God allowed Jesus to die a violent death in order to save the world and that in his resurrection Christ overcame the powers of death. This way of understanding atonement has often resulted in glorifying the suffering of the innocent and the inevitability of the suffering of some for the sake of many.

Even as they hold that Jesus' death was pre-ordained for the salvation of the world, the gospels also speak of some specific instances that conspired to bring about his death. A look at these would perhaps be helpful. Jesus provoked the Pharisees to conspire with Herodians "to destroy" him by healing the man with a withered hand and defying the Sabbath laws: an act of empowering the dis-empowered (Mk 3: 1-6). Following the incident in the temple that restored worship space for the gentiles and also put an end to the unholy alliance between temple administration and business interests, the chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people kept looking for "a way to kill him" (Lk. 19: 45-47). The chief priests and the crowds insisted that Pilate execute Jesus, saying "he stirs up people with his teaching" (Lk. 23: 1-5). Jesus rejected the assumptions of the powerful as the inheritors of the kingdom, which made the chief priests and the Pharisees consider "arresting him" (Mk. 21: 33-46). The high priest, scribes and elders accused him of blasphemy, "deserving death" when Jesus' claims of authority threatened the hegemony of the establishment (Mt. 26: 57 - 68).

Deenabandhu Manchala, from India, is the programme executive for theological reflections on peace in the WCC's Faith & Order team.

It is then possible to hold that it was his confrontation with the powers and his courage to expose their shallowness and immorality that led Jesus to the cross? The powers were exposed by Jesus' defiance in obedience to God's power that affirms life for all. They could not kill his determination and therefore their act was proved futile on the cross. "Christ disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it." (Col.2: 15) It is this legacy that forms an important affirmation of the early Christian communities. "For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph.6: 12). Is it then possible to see God's plan of salvation in Jesus' courage, to defy even to the point of death, for the sake of the sanctity of life and the world?

Mere resistance does not help in a world that is trapped in a belief-system that sees no alternatives to the visions and projects of the powerful. Providing alternatives is an important aspect of responsible resistance.

We need to counter violent powers with the logic of peace. Isn't this what Christian hope is all about: Celebrating "hope amidst turmoil", discovering "streams in the desert" and upholding "light in darkness"?? When the world is made to believe that violence is the only way, we are called to uphold the path of peace and prove that peace is possible without violence. The DOV provides us an opportunity for this creative search.

Perhaps this is what Jesus meant when he called the multitudes that followed him everywhere, even to the mountaintop, to be the salt of the earth and light

of the world, transforming hopeless situations of life. Jesus tells his disciples that the alternative to the dominating power is the power of service (Mk.10: 35-45).

He asks those who followed him to overcome the spirit of vengeance and rivalry and begin to love and to pray for their enemies. The son who remained loyal to the father was asked not be envious of the one who returned home. Those who have should not grumble when those who do not have get what they are deprived of. Those whose debts are forgiven must forgive the debts of others. Those who have wealth and power must go back, sell everything or give up everything and share it with the poor in order to discover themselves afresh as transformed human beings. In the new heaven and new earth, people plant and eat their fruits, build houses and live in them and the wolf gives up its violent instincts so that the lamb can feel safe. Against the logic of the empire that defines the contours of the New World through the accumulation of wealth, power, military security, monocultures and the suppression of freedom, God's political economy calls for a new ethic of love, justice, mutuality and interdependence in human relationships. This ethic calls for a transformation of not only the violated but also the violators who believe they are more important than others.

This may sound idealistic or be brushed aside as rhetoric. Interestingly enough, peoples' movements in many parts of the world are doing precisely this. The Dalit movements, by reclaiming their egalitarian past and rewriting their history of centuries of oppression, are exposing the injustice and cruelty that lie behind the patina of the sophisticated spiritual traditions of the mystic land of India. "Dalit", which means oppressed, the name they have given themselves in place of other imposed names, is their way of exposing the oppressive character of the Hindu society. By calling themselves Dalit they are exposing the means by which their oppressors have become rich and powerful. However, by joining hands with other dis-empowered peoples, they are articulating an alternative vision of Indian society.

Such movements, which have come together in the past three years in the World Social Forum, rally around the theme: "Another World is Possible". The legacies of Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi and others must be reclaimed, even if the prevailing powers do not seem to be inhibited by the moral power of non-violent resistance. The demonisation of the anti-globalisation movements and the violence used against them in the recent times is a case in point.

Similarly, contextual theologies, which grew out of protest against the irrelevance and oppressive potential of traditional theologies, offer creative possibilities to perceive the meaning of faith in a much more down-to-earth and life-affirming way. In the same way, churches, such as the historic peace churches, which grew out of the fringe and without the patronage of the powers, also offer alternative ways of exercising power. There have also been experiments in forming and living as non-hierarchical communities and ashrams in many parts of the world. These might also help to redefine power in ways that affirm the dignity and value of one another.

RETHINKING CULTURE AND POWER IN THE CONTEXT OF VIOLENCE

By Peter Kanyandago

Allow me to start my reflection at a personal level. I was born in 1951 and grew up in a rural setting in Uganda. We never closed our houses - we did not even have a door! Neighbours could come and enter our house and take out fire, salt, and even food. That was true about 50 years ago. Today, we are expected to build "permanent houses" and use doors that must be locked because we feel insecure. When I was young, we used to fear animals; today we fear one another.

These anecdotal remarks will serve as a background to my contribution. They support my main argument, which is premised on the fact that most of the violence that we know is a result of the way we have managed relations among ourselves and with nature. The violence we attribute to nature, from floods and earthquakes for example, is more devastating when we build in places where we should not. Secondly, I argue that violence is not inevitable. Some people find it difficult to accept this statement. In an Ecumenical meeting I presented the following text to support what I am saying and some people found it highly controversial: An American anthropologist quoted from an old man, Papa Atanga from Ntumuland, in Cameroon: "Man is good and man is precious and, like the comb of honey, his goodness is inexhaustible. When you think that there is none left, there is still more to be found. This you should not forget". Some people found this belief in intrinsic human goodness rather strange.

Papa Atanga's words should serve as a reminder, even to us Christians, that our attitudes towards violence can increase and justify it. It also indicates that not all people have a propensity for evil. Western Christianity is still marked by devotions and doctrines that stress our weakness as human beings who cannot do much to help themselves without the intervention of God. This has been reinforced by the doctrine of atonement, which tends to give some positive meaning to suffering. Rather than limit all this to the theological domain, I would like to see it as a cultural tendency that influences theological discourse, and not the other way round.

Violence therefore should be seen as a consequence of the practices rooted in a given world view of a people. Like any other cultural phenomenon, it is not inevitable; it is a social construct. If this premise is not acceptable, then all our attempts to find solutions to violence are futile. We can also say that over the past years violence has increased quantitatively. The different types of violence have also increased, including gratuitous violence against innocent victims for the sake of defending certain rights.

Power and powerlessness

Although in many instances violence is linked to the abuse of power, the latter should not be demonised. Failure to see power as all that allows us to be and to do things will make it difficult for us to give it a framework and institutions to manage it properly. The concept of power is captured nicely in the French language where the verb "*pouvoir*", meaning, "to be able to", also means "power". Understood this way, each human being needs power to exist, to relate to others and to be able to influence other people and events around her/him. All this is necessary for personal and social fulfilment.

Lack of power that one needs for self-realisation can lead to violence. The American psychologist Rollo May has ably defended this view. May explains power as something all human beings need to realise their potential. Through power, we affirm ourselves, so that we can be recognised. If this fails, May argues, the person is powerless, *impotent*, in the sense of lacking power. For May, violence is rooted in powerlessness. Contrary to what conventional knowledge tell us, violent people and violent societies are powerless.

If we put all this on the cultural plane, power assumes an institutional and social dimension. All cultures (societies) have designed over time the means to ensure their survival in the way they manage relations among themselves, with those they call "strangers" and with nature, especially with the resources it provides. Power is used to create and manage institutions and practices that ensure the survival and welfare of the community. Different cultures have different economic, political and other institutions that have been developed to do this. So stated, culture and power pose no problem, but in concrete historical and cultural circumstances, they sometimes generate violence. At the cultural level, violence is associated with the abuse of power of different types, especially power and influence over others and over resources. Cultural assumptions and social conditioning will tend to justify why, for example, one group has more than others, or why one culture claims that it is superior and has to tell others what to do. Such attitudes and assumptions have led to what has been called "ethnic cleansing". They play a legitimising role and can be difficult to change.

Intra- and inter-cultural violence

On the cultural level, we can distinguish, without separating, two aspects of violence, namely intra-cultural (within a given culture) and intercultural (between different cultures) violence. Violence at the intra-cultural level is not difficult to understand because it receives a lot of attention. For example at gender level, it includes the way women are mistreated in some cultures. Female genital mutilation as practised in some parts of Africa and other cultures has received a lot of attention in this respect. This practice is embedded in cultural assumptions to the extent that women themselves sometimes defend it. Other forms of violence that have been identified include widow inheritance.

Although violence against children is generally dealt with as an intra-cultural phenomenon, in some cases it needs to be analysed in the light of the new economic conditions, which force families to send their children to work. Without having to justify such practices, an approach

that limits itself to the intra-cultural level might not sufficiently address the problem. With these few remarks, it can be stated that cultural violence is linked to how power is used by those who hold it.

Globalisation and violence

I would like to take a closer look at inter-cultural violence, not only because it receives less attention, but also because it is not usually looked at in terms of power and culture, and yet it assumes international dimensions, and often exacerbates the effects of cultural violence. Let us take the example of globalisation, which is widely talked about and discussed these days. Here, it is important to show how it is linked to the management of power within a given cultural context. Globalisation is not just an economic phenomenon that has rendered borders almost useless; it is also an expression of the West's claim of superiority, a model whose social (cultural) institutions should be followed.

For many people, global capitalism, for example, might appear as the only possible economic system one can imagine, especially after the demise of the Soviet block. But capitalism has its roots in a given cultural, historical and philosophical setting which celebrates the primacy of the individual over the community. This is a cultural statement. There are other economic systems operating in the world. Globalisation in this sense is not global, because the majority of the people in the world do not participate in it, but are its victims. We can also say that the expansion of global capitalism is directly linked to an anthropological tendency rooted in the Western world view that the world outside belongs to them and can be used as they want. Colonisation, misguided evangelisation and the slave trade cannot be properly understood without linking them to this cultural assumption.

It is also taken for granted that the policies that the International Financial Institutions impose on the so-called poor countries are devoid of cultural significance. Behind these policies one can find cultural assumptions that do not question Western culture and ethos. A more insidious cultural assumption is that the West can do no wrong. That is why at the Durban international conference on racism, the West, led by the USA, could not even consider making an apology for the slave trade, and yet there is no other human-made violence worse than the slave trade. The refusal of the USA to sign the protocols to control emissions of gases which damage the environment is not only a stance motivated by keeping living standards high in that part of the world. Behind that stance is the unavowed anthropological claim that the Americans have a natural right to enjoy better standards of living, even if this has a negative effect on the lives of other people and on nature. This has been sometimes encapsulated in the expression "the American dream" or more generally in the concept of the "New World Order". These are assumptions that have important consequences, especially as they have a negative effect on other people and cultures.

Following on the above, this form of violence can also be seen as powerlessness; the West feels impotent because of the lack of resources it feels it needs to sustain itself. It therefore has to look beyond its frontiers to secure what it perceives as its needs for survival. The conflict in the Middle East can indeed be analysed in this perspective. These observations do not imply a round condemnation of all Westerners. On the contrary, many of them might not even be aware of the terrible consequences their style of life has on other people. Some of them are lucid and question these assumptions and attitudes. For example, while reflecting on 11 September (2001), the American anthropologist Wade Davis says:

> "Wealth too can be blinding. Each year, Americans spend as much as much on lawn maintenance

as the government of India collects in federal tax revenue. The 30 million African-Americans collectively control more wealth than the 30 million Canadians... A country that effortlessly supports a defence larger than the entire economy of Australia does not easily grasp the reality of a world in which 1.3 billion people get by on less than $ 1 a day. A new and original culture that celebrates the individual at the expense of family and community... has difficulty understanding that in most of the world the community still prevails, for the destiny of the individual remains inextricably linked to the fate of the collective".

These observations show that inter-cultural violence cannot be dealt with in one area alone; there is also a structural dimension to be taken into account.

Christianity and Inter-cultural violence

Where is Christianity in all this? It is helpful to look at Christianity in its historical and cultural setting. Today, it is widely accepted that Christianity has been associated with cultures that promote the indiscriminate exploitation of the environment; the primacy of reason over emotions; the celebration of masculine force; and a certain mistrust of the body and earthly realities. It is no wonder that violence found in some Christian sects is linked to the denial of the body, a thirst to escape from this world, usually associated with the pronouncement of the eminent end of the world. Christianity does not officially defend these views, but they exist at the same time in the cultural matrix of Europe, from where Christianity grew and many countries have been evangelised. Although one finds much violence in the Bible, this has been reinforced by cultural interpretations that find some kind of theological justifications in those passages. But these cultural attitudes are not predetermined, nor are they unchangeable. The only big difference is that the West has had the means of presenting, and sometimes imposing, them as universal.

Christianity, which must be distinguished from what we know as God's plan to save us, must therefore be considered as contributing towards inter-cultural violence; it mediates cultural assumptions that are violent. Patriarchy, which oppresses women, should be seen more as a cultural phenomenon than a Christian phenomenon. In Africa for example, women used to play important roles - and some still do - in religious functions. They were mediums, and in the Great Lakes Region of Africa, women held religious roles as medicine women and priestesses. With the advent of Christianity, in which power and authority were limited to ordained men, women were relegated to the background, and the new religion undoubtedly reinforced cultural prejudices against women in this part of the world.

Violence can be overcome

Let us recall Papa Atanga'a words that human beings' goodness is inexhaustible, like a comb of honey. We should not take this for granted. Atanga's statement is an ethical one and it therefore requires an ethical commitment to ensure that our goodness is not exhausted by violence. Various movements and organisations, including the ecumenical search for justice and reconciliation, reinforce our conviction that violence can be overcome. As violence has become pervasive, some of these movements have assumed trans-national dimensions. The influence of the anti-globalisation movement has to be reckoned with when, for example, the

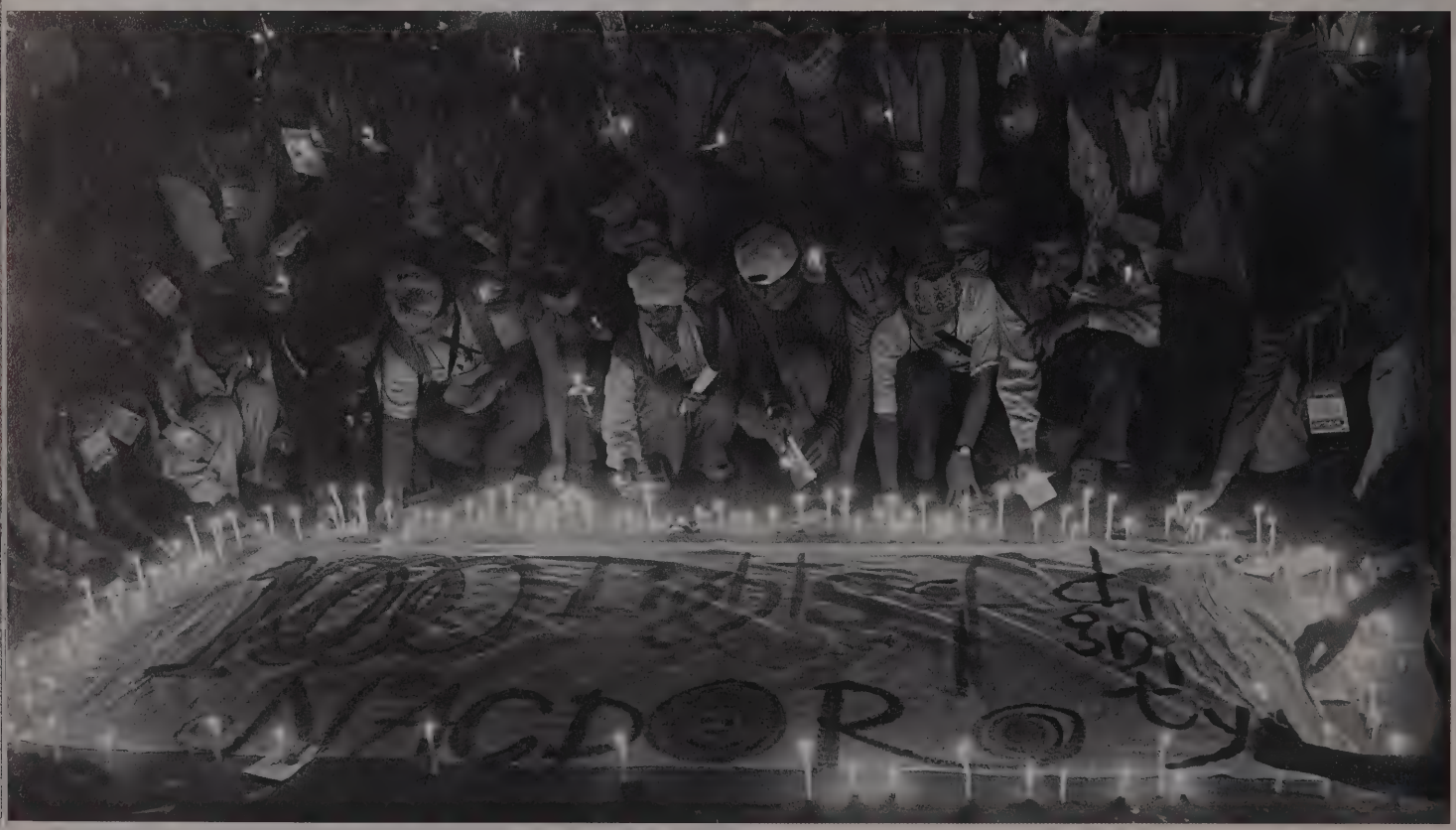
G-8, the World Bank and the IMF have their meetings. Other organisations defend the integrity of creation. These positive signs should be supported, and the people involved in them should be encouraged to network so that power can be used to promote the well being of all people.

Peter Kanyandago is Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Uganda Martyrs University, where he is also Director of the African Research and Documentation Centre. His research work aims to look for an interface between theology and anthropology, especially in the African context. He has published several articles in this field and is involved in the promotion of ecumenical education.

Conclusion

Although violence is found in cultural practices and is associated with the abuse of different types of power, it should not be seen as inevitable. Nor should we conclude from this that people and their cultures are naturally violent. Violence is a social construct and fighting it should aim at identifying the root causes that can be found in people's search for survival. Such an approach cannot be used to justify violence, but it can help us in targeting its root causes instead of focusing on treating its symptoms. Christianity and its practices should also be analysed in the light of what has been said, because these are also influenced by cultural assumptions.

In a world in which inter-cultural influences have assumed increasing importance, we need to give more attention to inter-cultural violence. Christians should join hands with those who are searching for the promotion of justice, the equitable sharing of resources and the protection of creation.



Power, at times,
Is like a mighty mountain
Towering strength
Solid foundation
A panoramic influence
Like the strength
And gentleness
Of a mother.
Like the courage
And self-determination
Of a people in bondage
And those living in war.

Power is like a flower
It is fragile and tantalizing
Refreshing to one's soul and eyes.

Yet, it is also like an arrow
That can pierce one's soul
Hurt one's body, and that of others'
Whenever power is abused
And misused.

Power is like a candle in the dark
It generates light.
But power, like the lighted candle,
must be handled with care
tempered with wisdom
and compassion;
Or we are gutted by fire
And can destroy
the rage of protest
in the midnight
Of struggle.

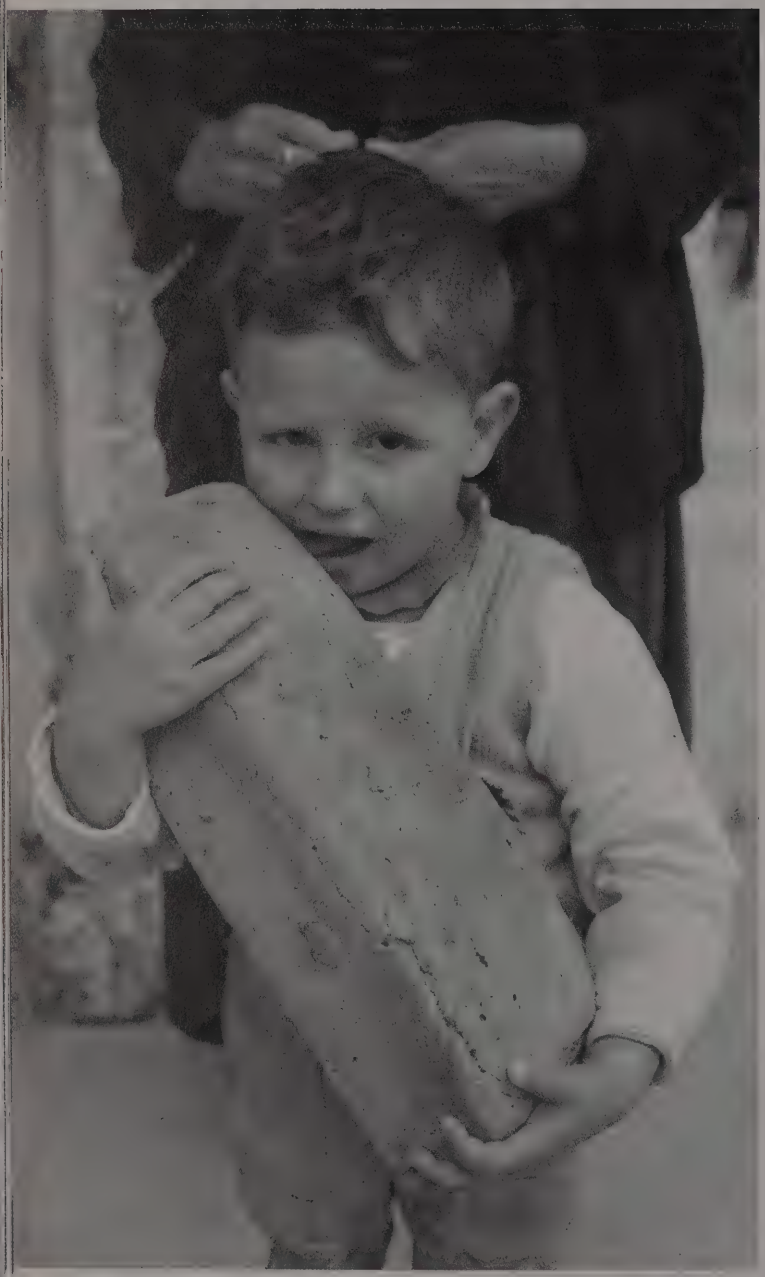
Power is the simple ability
To create something beautiful.
Power resides in many houses:
Political, economic, socio-cultural,
Personal and collective power.

By Elizabeth S. Tapia

Spirituality of Resistance

Paper presented at the WCC Internal Encounter of Churches, Agencies and Other Partners on the World Bank and IMF Geneva, 12 September 2003

By Konrad Raiser



Why introduce spirituality into this context?

The topic of this session stands out somewhat among the other - more technical - subjects. So you may have asked yourselves: Why introduce spirituality into this context? What does spirituality have to do with wealth creation, with economic globalisation or the commodification of public goods?

Of course, in one sense one would expect church people, especially theologians, to talk about spirituality and about values. They are the specialists in this area, while economists know best about the dynamics of the economic and financial system and how it actually works. As long as religious and spiritual leaders stay in their field of competence and talk about spirituality, the roles are clear. Spirituality refers to people's personal and most intimate convictions and motivations, whereas the economy follows objective laws that are reflected in mathematical formulas and models. The economy deals with the material side of human life, with the production and distribution of goods and services. Of course, people - at least some people - may also need spirituality and religion for their self-fulfilment, but to provide for this need falls outside the realm of the economy and is therefore usually neglected in the basic assumptions which enter economic analyses and calculations.

Why, then, should business people, bankers, politicians and representatives of the international financial institutions seek dialogue with religious and spiritual leaders? Why should the President of the World Bank, together with the former Archbishop of Canterbury, initiate the World Faith Development Dialogue? Why should Professor Klaus Schwab, the President of the World Economic Forum, seek ways to form an advisory council of religious and spiritual leaders to accompany the efforts of the Forum?

These initiatives do reflect a beginning change in the understanding of religion and spirituality and their influence not only on people's private lives, but even in the public realm, including the economic and financial system. After four development decades, it becomes more and more obvious that the dominant policies were based on a one-sided understanding of how people act in society and therefore did not achieve the expected results. In many cultures, religion and spirituality continue to play a central role in shaping social interactions. The process of secularization which has led to the privatization of religion in many western societies has not spread to other cultures in the same way as was expected. In fact, we are witnessing a resurgence of religion not only as a spiritual, but also as a political force, not least in the context of responding to the impact of globalisation.

What is more: we become increasingly aware that the functioning of the economy and of the financial system presupposes and relies on a social fabric which is maintained through internalized values, attitudes and motivations which in turn have their roots in religion and are being regenerated through spirituality. This "social capital" which is reflected in virtues like trust, faithfulness, mutuality and solidarity, has traditionally been taken for granted in economic analyses and thus not been accounted for. This is all the more surprising since the traditional language regarding economic and financial transactions is full of references to this foundation of social capital. Without "trust", "credit" and the readiness for "sacrifice" and the expectation of "redemption", no economy and no financial system would be able to function.

Today we realize that the prevailing economic and financial policies which have been given global validity through the international financial institutions, have been using up the social capital which had been accumulated through generations and centuries without replenishing. In fact, the values promoted by these policies reflect a reductionist view of the human condition in terms of the homo oeconomicus and continue to undercut and erode the social fabric without which the economy itself gets caught in contradictions and dilemmas which it cannot solve with its own means. Thus we see among economic and political leaders, including those responsible in the international financial institutions, an increasing interest in questions of social and religious values. The Global Ethic project of Hans Küng responds to this interest and finds broad support even among leading bankers.

This interest should be taken seriously, and many religious and spiritual leaders have responded readily since they share the concern. However, important as religion and spirituality might be for regenerating lost social capital, they cannot just produce it as the economy produces goods and services. Furthermore, they will fail if they avoid entering with their counterparts into a critical review of the very reductionist view of the human condition which underlies the prevailing economic paradigm. Even less must they allow themselves to be used to lend legitimacy to an economic and financial system which has failed to deliver according to its own criteria.

The Russian social philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev is often quoted as having said: "My daily bread is a material problem. The daily bread of my neighbour is a spiritual problem." In that sense, spirituality indeed belongs into this context. But then it will and it must challenge the prevailing logic of the economy which assumes that following one's own self-interest is the most effective way of contributing to the well-being of all. Spirituality refers to that vital network of relationships within which all life, including human life, moves and is being sustained and which cannot be nurtured by satisfying material needs. Translating this understanding of the human condition into the language of the economy would mean to place the "common good" above the satisfaction of individual self-interest and to acknowledge cooperation and mutuality as decisive factors in interpreting and understanding economic life instead of focusing on competition as the main driving force.

What, then, do we talk about? [1]

In this opening part of my reflections, I have spoken in very general terms about "spirituality" and "religion" and assumed that spirituality refers to that source of energy which generates and regenerates a sense of purpose and recognition of values in social life and thus nurtures the social fabric. With these references I have followed a development in current public discourse where spirituality has begun to attract renewed interest. In our increasingly pluralist societies, there is a growing interest in different forms and practices of spirituality, and we even observe the development of a market catering for the spiritual needs of people. Offering spiritual guidance can even become a new form of business, particularly among people whose

material needs are more than satisfied.

On the other hand, we see a renewed quest for spirituality among those who are struggling for justice and human dignity; for them spirituality refers to the energy which sustains people in the struggle. Experiences of defeat and prolonged oppression, but also occasional moments of victory and liberation, have led many of those engaged in people's movements to reappropriate the values of their spiritual traditions. It should be clear from these brief indications that spirituality has become a notion with relatively loose contours. For any responsible discourse it is necessary, therefore, to indicate what we are talking about.

Traditionally, "spirituality" stands for a life of prayer and contemplation, for liturgy and the attitude of waiting upon God. In many traditions, spirituality has been associated with the disciplined life of monastic communities which have consciously separated themselves from everyday life and its conflicting demands. For centuries, this ascetic tradition of spirituality, sustained by a life under the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, has been upheld vicariously by those with a special vocation for prayer and contemplation. It was recognized that ordinary people could not submit themselves to those demands of a spiritual life except occasionally on retreats, pilgrimages and during the appointed periods of fasting.

However, the ecumenical movement has contributed to the rediscovery and re-affirmation of another dimension of spirituality which has always been alive in the church and not least among the monastic orders. From the early Benedictine motto ora et labora to the programmatic linkage between struggle and contemplation by the Taizé Community, from the missionary spirituality of the simple presence to the affirmation of a liturgy after the liturgy in Orthodox thought, there have been numerous attempts to live a life of spirituality in the midst of worldly struggles.

At the Nairobi Assembly of the WCC in 1975, the Moderator of the Central Committee, Dr. M.M. Thomas, pointed to this newly discovered dimension of spirituality with the phrase "spirituality for combat".[2] He did not propose a spiritual upgrading of political struggles, nor was he interested in instrumentalizing spirituality as a moral preparation for combat. Rather, he wanted to point to the fact that the struggles for justice and human dignity have a spiritual dimension of their own. In fact, the powers that be, whether political, economic or financial, tend to cultivate their own spirituality, calling for sacrifices and asking for trust and faithful allegiance. The struggle for justice very often is a struggle about true and false spirituality, about true and false worship, or about serving God or an idol. M.M. Thomas added: "Let us not forget that our struggle is not merely against others but also against ourselves, not against flesh and blood, but against the false spiritualities of the idolatry of race, nation and class and of the self-righteousness of ideals which reinforce collective structures of inhumanity and oppression".[3]

The impulse provided by M.M. Thomas to place the reflection about spirituality into the context of worldly struggles has opened up a discussion which has found its echo in subsequent assemblies. Thus, following this line of thought, the Vancouver Assembly affirmed that "the spiritual struggle of the church must involve it in the struggle of the poor, the oppressed, the alienated and the exiled. The Spirit is among struggling people."[4] And the assembly added the recommendation: "That the churches explore forms through which Christian spirituality is manifested in the struggle for justice and human dignity."[5]

In the period between the Assemblies at Vancouver (1983) and Canberra (1991) the search for "a spirituality for our times" was the focus of intensive ecumenical dialogue and reflection. The report of Section IV of the Canberra Assembly under the title "Holy Spirit - transform and sanctify us!" summarizes the affirmations on ecumenical spirituality arising from these dialogues in the following terms: "Spirituality - in its manifold forms - is about receiving energy for life, being cleansed, inspired and set free, in every way being conformed to

Christ. An ecumenical spirituality for our times should be incarnational, here and now, life-giving, rooted in the scriptures and nourished by prayer; it should be communitarian in celebrating, centred around the eucharist, expressed in service and witness, trusting and confident. It will inevitably lead to suffering; it is open to the wider oikoumene, joyful and hopeful. Its source and guide is the action of the Holy Spirit. It is lived and sought in community and for others. It is an ongoing process of formation and discipleship."[6]

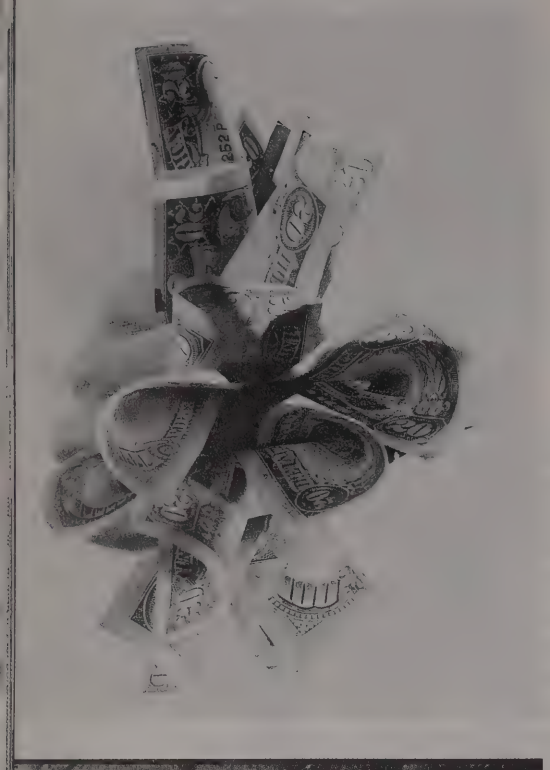
The aspects of this description which are of particular significance for our reflection are the understanding of spirituality as energy for life; its incarnational character or rootedness in the here and now, in the world of human life and struggles; its orientation towards community and its openness to the wider oikoumene.

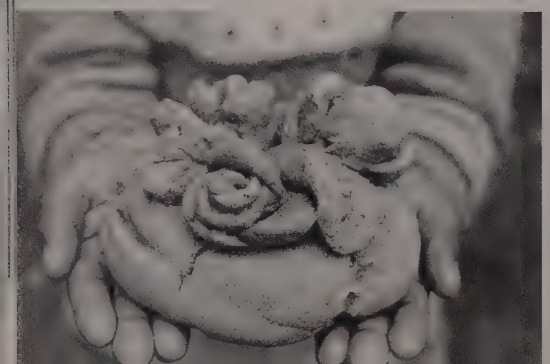
Gwen Cashmore and Joan Puls, animators of this ecumenical dialogue after the Vancouver Assembly, built their introduction to an ecumenical spirituality around the notions of openness, connectedness and earthedness.[7] Openness is the ability to transcend oneself, one's horizon; it is the willingness to make room for the other, to open oneself to the action of the Spirit; it is the manifestation of humility, the readiness not to insist on being right but to make oneself vulnerable and to be transformed in the encounter with others. Connectedness is the recognition that all life is sustained by bonds of community. All life participates in a delicate web of interconnections, in the flow of energy originating in God the Creator. Connectedness as a mark of spirituality finds its expression in the recognition and practice of cooperation, reciprocity and mutuality over a culture based on self-interest and competitiveness. Earthedness, finally, binds the ecumenical spirituality to the everyday conditions of life at a given time and place. Recognizing its finiteness and limitations, in constant dialogue with its culture and social environment, an earthed spirituality takes seriously the temptation to worship false gods; it accepts the task of 'discerning the Spirit' and nurtures the capacity for resistance, for endurance and staying power in the struggle to unmask the powers and principalities of this world (cf. Eph. 6:10-13).

From an Asian perspective, Masao Takenaka has pointed to the way in which images and symbols rooted in the local culture can nurture the power of spiritual imagination and shape the human sense of responsibility. In an essay on Asian spirituality entitled God is Rice, he interprets a poem by the Korean Christian poet Kim Chi Ha, Heaven is Rice, which meditates on the highly symbolic character of rice as the daily food for people in Asia. "The Chinese character for peace (wa) literally means harmony. It derives from two words: one is rice, and the other is mouth. It means that unless we share rice together with all people, we will not have peace. When every mouth in the whole inhabited world is filled with daily food, then we can have peace."[8] This leads to two important considerations: "When we say that God is rice, we do not mean that we should worship rice. We take rice as the symbol of God's gift of life. ... Second, if we acknowledge that God is rice, the symbolic source of the whole creation, and if we accept nature as our companion rather than as an object to be conquered or exploited, there will be a decisive change in our attitude towards the ecological issues."[9]

This approach to spirituality as rooted in the culture of people, especially the people of the 'Third World', is reflected also in the report of the 1992 Assembly of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians in Nairobi. In his introduction, K.C. Abraham quotes the preparatory statement by the Theological Commission of EATWOT which, referring to the same poem by Kim Chi Ha, says: "The cry of the Third World is a cry for life. It is a cry for freedom and dignity that constitute life as human. It is a cry for the rice and bread that sustains life as well as for the community that symbolizes and grows from rice and bread eaten in company. ... Rice and bread for one person alone may not be spiritual because it may be selfish. ... Or in the words of Nikolai Berdiaev, rice for myself alone may be unspiritual, but rice for my hungry sister and brother is spiritual. Thus our cry for life is a cry for the bread and the rice of life and for the spirituality of all the activities, processes and relationships bound up with producing and sharing rice and bread. Ours is a cry for a spirituality of and for life."[10]

The final statement of the assembly, entitled "A Cry for Life", refers especially to the cries of women, of black, indigenous and hispanic peoples as well as to the ecological movement. It states: "We live our spirituality in creative response to the cry for life, the cry for God. We celebrate our spirituality in songs, rituals and symbols which show the energizing spirit, animating the community to move together in response to God. ... There is no room for romanticizing spirituality. It is a cry for life, a power to resist death and the agents of death.





Spirituality is the name we give to that which provides us with the strength to go on, for it is the assurance that God is in the struggle."11 And the statement describes this spirituality as a spirituality of commitment, rooted in a radical conversion to the God of liberation and life and able to inspire the search for alternatives beyond capitalism and socialism.

Can spirituality and resistance go together?

It was the purpose of the preceding section to clarify the understanding of spirituality which motivates us and provides orientation in the encounter with those who carry responsibility in the present economic and financial system. The ecumenical discussion over these past 30 years of intense involvement in the development debate and in the struggles for justice and human dignity has led us to embrace a politically engaged spirituality which cannot simply be subsumed under the generalized notions of religious spiritual praxis which comprises everything from eastern forms of contemplation to modern programmes of spiritual self-realization. In particular, spirituality in this understanding transcends the individual and the closed horizon of the material conditions of life. It is the praxis of affirming and caring for life as a sacred gift from the Creator which is being sustained only as it is being shared in community. By the same token, spirituality as the energy for life in all its fullness implies the commitment to resist all forces, powers and systems which reduce, deny or destroy life.

The background document under the title "Lead Us Not into Temptation", which was prepared by the WCC to assist churches in their responses to the policies of international financial institutions, is guided by the same understanding of spirituality. "There is ... a long tradition of Christian spirituality which has been critical of the powers that be, even ecclesiastic. This tradition is based on loyalty to God above loyalty to institutions, ideologies and structures. This spirituality has given the powerless the strength and courage to oppose those that abuse power."[12] It emphasizes that spirituality embraces all dimensions of life and is linked to the social, cultural, environmental and historical conditions of societies and their value systems. In this relational understanding of spirituality, God or the transcendent, the individual person, the human community and nature are intimately intertwined. "This means that a spirituality that speaks only about the individual, or which believes the individual is the only basis for spirituality, must be questioned. All dimensions must be equally valued as it is the case in so many social, cultural and religious traditions that value life in community higher than the dominant western culture. Christians in various church traditions embrace a spirituality of life in community and of combating evil in confronting the powers of death. They stand against powers, be they economic, political, cultural or social, which deny to human beings, and the rest of creation, the possibilities of living a spiritual life. By extension, structures which break down the basic nature of fellowship of humankind and nature must also be named and opposed."[13]

A traditional understanding of spirituality would have questioned the very title of this presentation. From that perspective, spirituality and resistance stand for diametrically opposed forms of praxis. However, as the background document in its third section shows, the biblical tradition is full of evidence for a publicly engaged spirituality, including acts of non-violent resistance. In particular, the Hebrew prophets exemplify a praxis of spirituality which challenges unjust structures and unmasks the misuse of power. The same is true for the gospel accounts of the proclamation and action of Jesus. The story of the temptation of Jesus can be considered as a model of a spirituality of resistance. And the Apostle Paul frequently uses the imagery of struggle to describe the Christian spiritual life, a struggle not against flesh and

blood and with weapons that cause harm or even death and destruction, but a struggle against "the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places", fought with the weapons of truth, righteousness and faith to proclaim the gospel of peace (cf. Eph. 6:10-17).

From this perspective, to speak of a "spirituality of resistance" is not only entirely appropriate, but makes us aware that the spiritual confrontation with all forms of exercising power which refuse to acknowledge their accountability before God and the human community is inevitable. Spirituality stands for the active presence of the power of God in human life which aims at enhancing life for all and defends those who are being excluded, the poor, the strangers and those who have been declared outcasts. Therefore, spirituality will have to challenge prophetically any form of power which sets itself absolute and is not legitimized by serving the common good. It will have to unmask false claims of authority and must seek ways of resisting policies and practices which serve to increase the power and wealth of the few while neglecting the basic needs and the right to life of the many.

Resistance can take many forms - from direct political intervention to symbolic actions, like prayer, fasting, public liturgies, boycotts, etc. Resistance as a form of spirituality does not follow the political logic which counts gains and losses and aims at effective change. Resistance is primarily a form of Christian witness, an affirmation of loyalty and obedience to God as the ultimate source of life over against all other claims of power and authority, whether political, economic, ethnic or cultural.

It is a spiritual resistance also against the absolute truth claims which exclude any alternative or dissent as well as against the self-righteous dichotomies of good and evil. One of the hidden ways of exercising power over people's lives and minds has been the claim that after the collapse of the communist system there was no alternative to the prevailing economic paradigm which was considered as reflecting the laws of nature. Any dissent was therefore treated as misguided, irrational or potentially dangerous and had to be suppressed. This tendency to absolutize a particular economic paradigm has had a paralyzing effect on political imagination and has contributed to a sense of fatalism, fear and defensiveness among people. Spirituality transcends the closed horizon of the system in hope and in love and thus becomes a resistance movement against fatalism, resignation and fear.

At the same time, a spirituality of resistance must guard itself against falling into the trap of self-righteousness by claiming absolute moral and spiritual authority and demonizing those who exercise power, ascribing to them evil intentions. The prophets and Jesus have unmasked and condemned sinful structures, but Jesus has welcomed the sinners, offering them the newness of life in the kingdom of God.

To quote once more Dr. M.M. Thomas in his report presented to the Nairobi Assembly of the WCC in 1975. He speaks there of the "need to struggle for justice with an awareness of human solidarity in sin and acknowledgement of divine forgiveness". And then he continues: "In moving from the concept of charity to that of justice we have to come to recognize the need for changing existing power structures. How can the struggles and conflicts to bring human dignity to the poor and the oppressed, even the power politics which oppose institutionalized violence with counter-violence, be kept within the spiritual framework of the ultimate power of the crucified Christ and the ultimate goal of reconciliation of all people in Christ?" And, quoting José Miguez Bonino, he concludes that "this requires recognition that 'our conflicts, even those which are most real and serious, can only be seen as penultimate. None of our battles is the final battle. None of our enemies facing us is the final enemy, the ultimate evil. Our contrasts

are never black and white, always grey. Today's enemy must tomorrow be accepted at another level as a brother. Similarly, it prevents us from seeing our achievements in absolute terms'."[14]

Signposts of a spirituality of resistance

Spirituality of resistance is an act of witness in the midst of the power struggles of our world. It calls for constant vigilance in the effort of "discerning the spirits". Such spiritual discernment is needed in the dialogue with the representatives of the international financial institutions to be able to distinguish between the officially proclaimed goals and the operational values which come into play in responding to concrete situations. Discernment is equally needed concerning the allegedly irrefutable logic of the prevailing economic paradigm or the claims of rationality put forward by the proponents of "political realism". Václav Havel has characterized this attitude of affirmative vigilance as "living in the truth". It is the courage to say "no" and to say "yes" which the message from the Amsterdam Assembly in 1948 described so powerfully.

The attempt to identify signposts for a spirituality of resistance leads us back to the conciliar process for justice, peace and the integrity of creation in which the ecumenical community has been engaged between the WCC Assemblies at Vancouver in 1983 and Canberra in 1991. The process culminated in the World Convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation at Seoul in March 1990. The most important legacy from this convocation are the Ten Affirmations on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. The affirmations are meant as a confession of faith in God who promises life in wholeness and right relationships for all humanity. Each of the affirmations therefore begins with a statement which applies this faith in God's promise to specific situations of conflict around justice, peace and the integrity of creation. Where the traditional affirmations of faith were complemented by a rejection or condemnation of false beliefs and errors, the action-oriented affirmations of Seoul are being reinforced by the declaration "we will resist", leading up to a final act of commitment.

The convocation concluded with a service of mutual commitment and covenanting for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. This service was built around the ten affirmations which name explicitly the signposts for a spirituality of resistance. These include:
- We resist the exercise of authority that monopolizes power and prohibits transformation;
- we resist the forces that create and perpetuate poverty or accept it as inevitable or ineradicable;
- we resist the denial of rights to any racial, ethnic, cast or indigenous groups, and the exploitation of women and children;
- we resist the structures of patriarchy that perpetuate violence against women; which exclude their full participation in church and society;
- we resist policies that deny freedom of expression; that concentrate the communication power in the hands of a few;
- we resist doctrines of national security based on the use of weapons of mass destruction, military interventions, and occupations;
- we resist the attitude to creation which treats it only as a resource for human exploitation;
- we resist all human greed that makes land a commodity, which denies the bonds between land and people;

which devastates the earth for profit;
- we resist authority that abuses, violates or exploits children and young people;
- we resist all systems and structures that violate human rights; that tolerate torture, disappearances, extra-judicial executions and the death penalty.[15]

These signposts for a spirituality of resistance have not lost their validity in the 14 years that have passed since the Seoul Convocation. On the contrary, they continue to stand as a clear witness to an alternative system of values and offer specific criteria for the process of spiritual discernment. They do not prescribe any particular form of action, but they can serve to provide orientation for those engaging in dialogue about the policies of the international financial institutions.

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[1] *In the section I have drawn on two previous publications of mine: Life in the Spirit, chapter 6 (pp. 56-61) in: The Political Economy of the Holy Spirit, by J. de Santa Ana, K. Raiser and U. Duchrow, WCC/Geneva 1990; Moral and Spiritual Formation, chapter III.2 (pp. 148-159) in: Konrad Raiser, For a Culture of Life. Transforming Globalisation and Violence, WCC/Geneva 2002*
[2] *Breaking Barriers-Nairobi 1975, ed.by David Paton, WCC/Geneva 1976, p.240*
[3] *Op.cit.,p.240*
[4] *Gathered for Life, ed. by David Gill, WCC/Geneva 1983, p. 85*
[5] *Op.cit., p. 89*
[6] *Signs of the Spirit, ed. by Michael Kinnamon, WCC/Geneva 1991, p.112*
[7] *See Gwen Cashmore and Joan Puls, Clearing the Way: En Route to an Ecumenical Spirituality, WCC/Geneva 1990*
[8] *Masao Takenaka, God is Rice: Asian Culture and Christian Faith, WCC/Geneva 1986, p.18f*
[9] *Ibid., p. 21f*
[10] *See Spirituality of the Third World, ed. by K.C. Abraham and Bernadette Mbuy-Beya, Orbis/Maryknoll NY 1994 p.3f*
[11] *Ibid., p. 197f*
[12] *Lead Us Not Into Temptation. Churches' Response to the Policies of International Financial Institutions, WCC/Geneva 2002, p. 27*
[13] *Ibid., p. 28*
[14] *Op. cit., 239f*
[15] *Now is the Time, Final Document and other Texts, World Convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation Seoul 1990, WCC/Geneva 1990, p. 48ff*

Konrad Raiser, a minister and theologian from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany was the General Secretary of the WCC between 1993 and 2003. He is the author of several books. His most recent is For a culture of Life – Transforming Globalisation and Violence, published by the WCC in 2002.

Power is the commitment
To serve the least,
the forgotten, and the exploited.
It boldly asks:
Why and who made them so?

Just Power, shared and life-giving power
Are to be welcomed and nurtured,
I believe and I hope
In the homes and hearts
Of citizens of the world.
Listen to the children.

Let us create something beautiful
Something life-giving
And has no tag price.
In all spheres of life.
In all minutes of our time.

The grace that transforms
Is Power
grace that
creates beauty and harmony
Is power.
the stopping of war machines
Is power
raging protest of the marginalized
Is power.
Breathing, sensing, creating
Is power.

Power is in you, my friend
Its beauty beckons you
To be open
To the radically new
To the radically just
To the radically honest
To the radically powerful!

Rev. Dr. Elizabeth S. Tapia, an ordained United Methodist pastor from the Philippines, is a Lecturer in Mission and Evangelism at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, Celigny, Switzerland.

NEW RESOURCES

THE COURAGE TO HOPE

The Roots for a New Vision and the Calling of the Church in Africa

Samuel Kobia

In this book Samuel Kobia examines the reality and potential of life in contemporary Africa. He raises the existential questions: "How are we to live authentic lives in the face of untold suffering within the continent of Africa? How are Africans, and others with a concern for Africa, to escape a sense of estrangement in the 21st century?"

Kobia surveys the legacy of Africa, "the primordial home of all humanity" that has nurtured a rich diversity of traditions, values and spirituality. He describes the African moral universe predicated on a web connecting all creation. He affirms that the African sense of identity growing from ancient traditions provides a rich spiritual resource for shaping a new Africa.

Addressing threats to the future of Africa - among them racism, neo-colonialism, poverty, corruption in government and HIV/AIDS - the author advocates for a transformation of consciousness based in the reaffirmation of human dignity. And as an expression of "the courage to hope", concludes Kobia, the world's churches are being called to become sanctuaries of life in the face of death.

Samuel Kobia was elected in August 2003 as the sixth general secretary of the World Council of Churches, succeeding Konrad Raiser at the beginning of 2004.

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ISBN 2-8254-1388-7 Price: CHF24.00, US$16.95, £10.95, €14.50

HOW JUST IS THE MARKET ECONOMY?

Edward Dommen

This theologically informed study in economic ethics focuses on the "world market" as an ideology, a formal theory and a practical device. It analyzes the tendency of economists to elaborate and impose market theory as dogma.

Such approaches are contrasted with principles of justice found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), the parable of the sheep and goats (Matthew 25:31-46) and the Reformed Protestant social theory of 16th-century theologian John Calvin. The author concludes that market mechanisms must be supplemented by additional tools to ensure that world needs may be fairly and correctly met.

Edward Dommen is an economist, retired following two decades of service to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

Bibliographic details: published in 2003, 116pp., Risk Book Series, WCC
ISBN: 2-8254-1399-2 Price: CHF18.00, US$13.95, £7.95, €11.50

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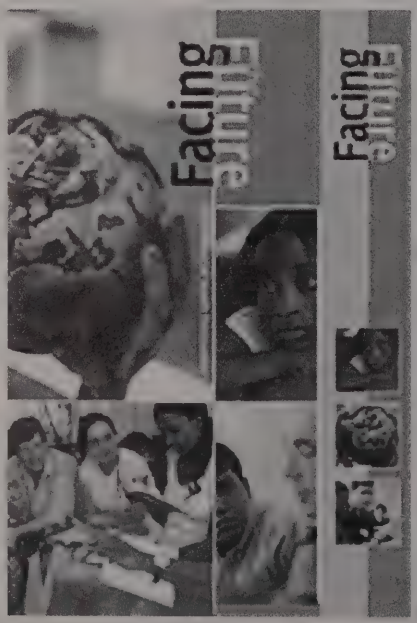

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